DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 934 EA 009 410

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TITLE Beyond the Political Model: A Strategic Model of Governance.
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, New York, April 4-8, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Personnel; Conceptual Schemes; *Decision Making; *Governance; *Models; Organizational Change; *Organizational Theories

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a strategic (or situational) model of governance that focuses on organizational decision-making activity. This model differs from other organizational models in that it focuses on the issues about which the activities of an organization are focused. This situational model has several advantages. First, it provides a conceptual framework in which to view and understand decision-making over time. Second, the model provides an understanding of the types of situations with which the administrator must contend within the organization and the means of identifying each type. Third, the model suggests what the most effective decision-making structures and processes are in relation to the conditions confronted. Fourth, the model explains why decision-making structure and processes can become ineffective and fail as conditions change. (Author)

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BEYOND THE POLITICAL MODEL: A STRATEGIC MODEL OF GOVERNANCE

presented by

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for the
American Educational Research Association
New York, April, 1977

This paper has two major purposes. First, it will present the basis and components of a strategic model of governance focused on decision making activity. Second, it will suggest that the perspective taken in the development of the model represents a more valuable approach to the analysis of organizations and to the utility of such concepts for the administrators who will make use of such work. Let's look at the perspective used in the development of the strategic model first.

The use of the term, "strategic" should suggest change and adaptation. This idea of a model which contains a dynamic quality in its conceptualization, is a key feature and can be best seen in the unit of analysis used for this model compared to other organizational models. Most discussions of organizations and the development of models about them uses, as the unit of analysis, a rather fixed and static approach. The unit is often

EA 009 110

the defining of types or typologies of organizations in terms of of characteristics which appear to be important. These typologies have been given labels denoting what might be termed, styles of organizations such as bureaucratic, professional, collegial, political, etc. The work in the field has been to accept the existence of such classifications, in fact to reify these conceptual constructs, and then work away at delineating and explaining their finepoints.

I am suggesting that the unit of analysis be shifted from the search for and examination of types or typologies of organizations to an analysis of issues about which the activities of organizations are focused in an operational way. I believe this shift in perspective will move the study of organizations from the creation and development of rather mechanistic, static models to the development of what might be termed as heuristic, action models of organization. This change in perspective is subtle and admittedly cannot be fully deliniated at this time. Yet, there is the sense that this change can have a major impact on making the study of organizations more relevant to administrators and managers. This shift in perspective will become more evident as the strategic model of governance is presented in this paper.

The problem is not that administrators lack theoretical concepts and models. They have sought for operational direction from the social and managerial sciences and have received much advice. Among the models which have held prominence are the bureaucratic, the human relations, the collegial, and the professional. During the last five years the political model has come to dominate the thinking of organizational theorists resulting in the expected spillover into the thinking and actions of administrators. Thus, administrators have a plethora of concepts on which to base action. The problem with these models is that none of them seem to provide much in the way of a comprehensive strategy of governance. A major part of this problem, as has been suggested, is the perspective underlying the models and not the models themselves. The paradigm presented will utilize this new perspective to suggest day-to-day strategies for the administrator. This new paradigm has been called the "situational model."

The situational model presents a basis for moving beyond the ideological dialogue occurring between theories by incorporating the strengths of previous models instead of seeking and defining a single, "best" model of organizations. The "situational" perspective permits handling the same data as previous theories but using them in new and combined relationships.

The situational model centers on how decisions are made, who makes them, what structures and processes are involved in their development, and under what conditions they operate. The beginning point is the manner in which two dominate models of organization - the bureaucratic and the political - develop their view of decision making and under what conditions these views fail. A review of the chief concerns of these major models demonstrates their conceptual limitations.

For many decades, most organizational studies followed the concepts of the bureaucratic model, taking their cue from Weber. The work of Etzioni (1961), Blau and Scott (1962), and Stroup (1966) are recent examples. This approach stresses classification of organizational elements such as bureaucratic authority, rules, supervision, work groups, etc. Organizational environment and change are considered mainly in terms of formal and static structure. This approach, patterned on the physicial sciences, attempts to control and stabilize the environment in order to obtain "clean" results. Thus, the researchers focus on the structure of the organization under stable conditions.

The political model takes its cues from political science, as in the work of Selznick (1949), March and Simon (1958), Clark (1960), Dahl (1961), Cyert and March (1963), Thompson (1967), and Baldridge (1971). These researchers stress the process in organizations and the environmental influences on decision processes.

They study the organization under the condition of change, instability, and openness. Their concern is with the process of decision making in terms of revision and change over against "decision continuity" or stability. The fact that conflict exists in the organization is a major concern. Thus, the research delineates the structure and procedures of conflict and tactics of conflict resolution.

Though these two major organizational models disagree on the basic premise, problem, and solution, there is an underlying similarity in their concerns. For example, those using the bureaucratic paradigm seek to determine legitimate authority. Those using the political paradigm seek to determine who attains authority. Both models view authority as set within the structure of their respective organizational images, thus creating an organizational fixity arising from their basic assumptions. Once either position is accepted as the way to view organizations and their operations, authority to make decisions is defined and its movement is bounded. Such a fixed approach to authority results in a crisis for these two positions and limits their utility and applicatton to many organizational realities. It particularly limits their usefulness in developing a strategy of governance.

A new analysis point of conceptual scrutiny is needed. A new paradigm is required, focusing on the environment of the issue. Rather than the authorities defining the nature and

structure of the issue, in the new model, the issue condition defines the nature, structure, and processes used by the authorities. In fact, the issue condition may define the relevant authorities. This shifts the perspective from a typology-based conceptualization to fit all situations to a situational approach which points to relevant structures and processes under a variety of conditions.

The problem for the person seeking administrative insight from these two organizational positions has been that each seems to be concerned with a different game. Exchange between these two positions in unproductive because problem definition and solutions stem from different assumptions. In his seminal work, Thomas Kuhn notes that "to the extent...two scientific schools disagree about what is a problem and what is a solution, they inevitably talk through each other debating the relative merits of their respective paradigms,"(p. 109). The major assumption of the bureaucratic model is organizational stability and it wrestles with any aberration that contradicts the stable model. In the political model, the major assumption is conflict, the problem is keeping it within controllable bounds; stability is an aberration. Yet, while these two models can't seem to relate together, there is much value in their conceptualizations. If there were not, they would not have become so prominent for such a period of time. But it should be reasonably clear that in spite of their strength, they are of limited use for administrative action. As far as organizational theory for the administrator is concerned, there is a crisis.

The crisis develops for the bureaucratic approach from the reality of the informal organization within the formal structure. The political paradigm has difficulty dealing with vast areas of organizational stability which seem to remain unchanged while conflicts and interest groups come and go. "Faced with an admittedly fundamental anomaly in theory, the scientist's effort will often be to isolate it more precisely and to give it structure. Though now aware that he cannot be quite right, he will push the rules of normal science harder than ever to see, in the area of difficulty, just where and how far they can be made to work," Kuhn, p. 86). This effort to "dig the hole deeper" results in much research on informal and small group dynamics for those using the bureaucratic model and in the search for continuing power elites for those using the political model to account for the anomaly of stability. Both these models of organization hold that they have deliniated the structure and process capable of dealing with any situation and issue the administrator might face. It is at this point where these "fixed" and static models fail and are in crisis.

A new perspective is needed. Instead of digging the hole deeper and continuing the search for the type of organizational structure and process of decision making on any issue, a new hole is needed focusing on the environment of an issue. This shifts the perspective from an organizational approach to fit all situations to a situational approach which points to the most relevant structures and processes related to an issue.

This perspective is the basis for the new organizational model for administrators called situational. This situational model meets two all important conditions necessary for a new paradigm acceptance as noted by Kuhn, (p. 168). "First, the new candidate must seem to resolve some outstanding and generally recognized proglem that can be met no other way." The situational model moves beyond the anomaly of instability in the bureaucratic model and the anomaly of stability in the political model. "Second, the new paradigm must promise to preserve a relatively large part of the concrete problem-solving ability that has accrued to science through its predecessors." The situational model builds on and incorporates a vast amount of the insights and concepts of both these models. "(A) new theory does not have to conflict with any of its predecessors...the new theory might be simply a higher level theory than those known before, one that linked together a whole group of lower level theories without substantially changing any."(Kuhn, p. 94). This linking together of several organizational theories is a major feature of the situational model.

Each theoretical position, (i.e.) bureaucratic and political can be compared to a lens of a telescope since each provides a perspective and magnification of an aspect of the scene being viewed but their power is limited and incomplete alone. Only when the conceptual lens relate to each other can they provide magnification and illumination of the organizational action and activity.

Sources of the Situational Model

The basis for the situational approach develops from general system theory with its concern for understanding the contesxt of the organism as well as the organism itself (Bertalanffy, 1958; Buckley, 1967 and 1968). This shift in perspective to focusing on the context of an organism has had its impact on organizational theory and research. Thus, while the underlying situational concept is not new, its conceptual unity and application to organizational theory and practice are recent, though not fully appreciated.

The situational approach has major heuristic value in dealing with organizational concerns such as structure, procedures, leadership, control, and planning. The research studies which the basis for the situational model include the work of Burns and Stalker (1961), Lawrence and Lorsch (1967, 1970, 1971), Fiedler (1967), and Thompson (1967). The conceptual basis of the situational model from these sources can be summarized.

When the relationship between management practices and the external environment of the organization is examined, two organizational forms stand out which have the characteristics of the bureaucratic and the political models. Out of this finding has developed a "contingency" theory of organizations. This approach holds that the internal functioning of organizations must be consistent with the demands of the organizational task, technology, and external environment.

The theory posits that appropriate internal states and processes of the organization are contingent upon external requirements and internal needs. The contingency position is expanded in the work on leadership which holds that different leadership styles result in high group performance under different conditions. The limitation of these theorists for administrative strategy is their focus on differences between organizations under different conditions. One study did shift the perspective to differences within an organization under different conditions (Galbraith, 1970). It shows a change in the structure and process of the organization as conditions change.

This change in perspective provides the basis for the situational model. The implication is that regardless of the particular condition of the general organizational environment, the characteristics of an issue within the organization can change. Thus, while the nature of the overall environment of and organization may be of a particular type - stable, certain, and routine, or dynamic, uncertain, and exceptional - particular issues within the organization requiring decisions may move from a stable context to a dynamic one and back again.

The key point is not whether the organization or some segment is stable or unstable, but rather the perspective is shifted to focus on whether an issue about which decision making occurs is stable or not. This leads to a major proposition for governance and its decision making action of the situational model - changes in the conditions of an issue produce changes in both decision making structure and process within organizations..

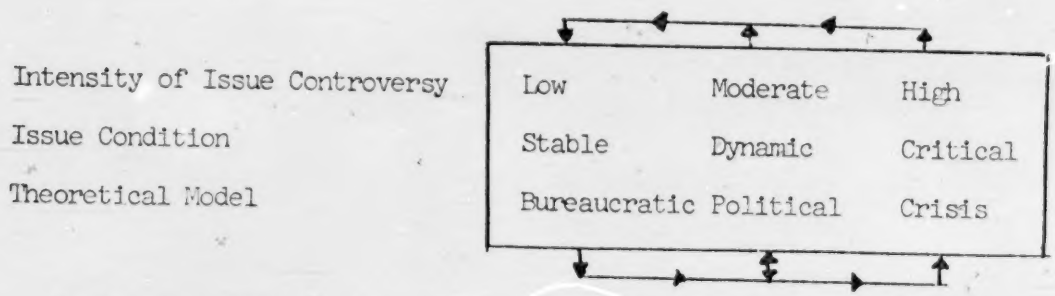
Using a typology of Litterer (1965), three types of issue conditions can be defined: stable, dynamic, and critical. The situational model holds that each issue condition has a particular structure and process associated with decision making under that condition. The situational model holds that no one organizational structure and process operates within the organization. Rather, several modes exist and which one is operational at any point in time is contingent on the environmental conditions of an issue. In fully developing the situational perspective, the bureaucratic and political models are subsumed into the situational model and an additional model - the crisis model - is added to relate to the trilogy of issue conditions.

What occurs then, is a change from a static organizational model or models and perspective to a dynamic issue perspective. As the intensity of concern surrounding an issue changes from low to moderate to high, the issue condition changes from a stable to a dynamic to a critical condition. The major proposition of the situational model holds that since each issue condition has a particular decision structure and process associated with it, then any change in the issue condition calls for and creates a different decision structure and process than was operating previously. This change through the different issue conditions is the issue cycle

Figure 1 shows in simplified form the relationship of the three issue conditions. The intention of the lines and arrows is to show that, over time, an issue condition can move from a stable issue condition either to a dynamic condition or directly to a critical condition. An issue can also move only to a dynamic condition and then return to a stable one. It is assumed that the efforts of the organization are to routinize and stablize decision making and since the level of importance of an issue changes over time, the stable condition with its bureaucratic features is considered a base point in the issue cycle.

FIGURE 1

The Issue Cycle



Furthermore, as the figure portrays, each issue condition has a particular structure and process associated with decision making under that condition. What is being argued is that problems can increase for the organization and the administrator making decisions if an issue condition changes and the administrator is slow to respond with the related decision making structure and process.

The situational model, which ties together previous views of organizations - the bureaucratic and political along with a crisis model - provides a conceptual framework for analyzing a variety of cases and contexts. To the degree that it accurately represents reality, it can assist the administrator or manager in determining what action is needed to see that the most appropriate decision making group exists at the proper time to fit the demands or context of the issue condition.

Major Propositions of the Situational Model

There are a variety of propositions which flow from the situational model on which administrative and organizational research can focus attention. These will be listed.

1. An issue varies in terms of the level of the intensity associated with it.
   - 1.1 The level of intensity is subject to changes in the organizational environment which affect the issue.
   - 1.2 The level of intensity can be determined by the amount of attention given to the issue within and beyond the organization.
2. As the intensity of the issue varies, there is a concomitant change in the condition in which the decision making on an issue occurs.
3. There is a distinct decision making structure and process related to each issue condition.
   - 3.1 The decision making structure and process of each issue condition is represented in previous organizational models.
     - 3.11 The decision making structure and process of the stable issue condition is best represented in the bureaucratic model.
     - 3.12 The decision making structure and process of the dynamic issue condition is best represented in the political model.
     - 3.13 The decision making structure and process of the critical condition is best represented in the crisis model.
4. A change in the issue condition requires a change in the structure and process of decision making on an issue within an organization.
   - 4.1 When a change from a stable to a dynamic issue condition occurs, decision making changes to a political mode.
   - 4.2 When there is a change in the issue condition to a critical issue condition, a crisis mode of decision making is required .
   - 4.3 When there is a change in the issue condition to a stable issue condition, decision making changes to a bureaucratic mode.

What is created, then, by the change in the issue condition over time, is an issue cycle in which the various theoretical views of the organization contained in the literature have applied utility for the administrator. The situational model links several organizational theories and models which have been utilized separately into a comprehensive approach. This situational approach can describe and predict the characteristics of and the changes in the structure and process of decision making on an issue within an organization over time. The result is a dynamic model for organizational governance which overcomes the limitations of a static perspective which cannot accommodate changing decision making conditions which are faced by an administrator.

The Implications of the Situational Model

The implications of the situational model are several. First, there is no single, most efficacious way to organize decision making structures within the organization regardless of its general environment. In fact, at least three decision making structures and processes develop according to the condition in which the decision making occurs. This should help to overcome the ideology of a particular school of organizational theory. No single organizational structure or administrative style will be effective in all decision making on issues which face an administrator.

Second, the situational model provides a strategy for the administrator to respond to changes in the issue condition and to create the appropriate decision making process and structure. Thus, rather than tied to a single approach the administrator can adapt and creat the decision making approach required according to the insights provided by previous organizational models. The situational model provides guidelines for shifting between organizational approaches.

Third, the situational model suggests several indicators of change in the issue condition. These include sensitivity to changes in the intensity of interest and concern focused on an issue either within the organization or its environment. Other indicators include determining how broad the issue is in terms of affecting many persons; the amount of control the administrator has over the decision issue, and the type of time pressure involved. For example, under a stable condition the issue is characterized by little impetus to examine broader concerns of an issue than are represented in a specific problem needing attention. However, when the concerns about an issue begin to braoden, it can be indicative of a beginning shift in the issue condition. If there is also an expansion of the decision area in terms of organizational members who had expressed little or no interest in the issue previously, this represents another indicator of condition change. Taken in corbination, these indicators provide strong evidence to the administrator that a new state of affairs is developing concerning the issue and the current approach may soon be inadequate.

Fourth, the situational model clearly suggests a situational basis for effective leadership with the demands of the organization requiring at least three distinct strategies of administrative leadership. What seems to be called for is an administrator who can change his style and organization to meet the demands of the changing conditions of an issue. The model provides direction to determine when and how such action should be taken by the administrator.

The advancement of knowledge about governance provided by the situational model is suggested in several areas. First, it provides a conceptual framework to view and understand decision making over time. Second, the model provides an understanding of the types of situations with which the administrator must contend within the organization and the means of identifying each type. Third, the model suggests what the most effective decision making structures and processes are in relation to the conditions confronted. Fourth, the model explains why decision making structure and process can become ineffective and fail as conditions change.

In a theoretical sense, the situational model subsumes and relates previous models of organizations into a unified and strategic model of organizational decision making for the administrator. Finally, it represents an effort to change the perspective of administrative conceptualization from the current static definitional theory and modeling about organizations toward a more dynamic strategic theory building and modeling approach.

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